

Katy Perry and the wealthy women of space

**Greed has no end, and the end of greed is resistance to every limitation—including the limitation of gravity.**

by [Liz Charlotte Grant](#)

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Image courtesy of Blue Origin

In April, pop star Katy Perry blasted off with the “taking up space” tour, organized by Jeff Bezos’s second wife, Lauren Sanchez. Perry, Sanchez, and four other women traveled 66 miles above the Earth’s surface in a Blue Origin rocket on the [NS-31 Mission](#). No other astronautic venture has sent *only* women into microgravity since the solo flight of Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova in 1963. The women vigorously promoted this supposedly historic “all-female” trip, but no one was fooled by this guise of historicity. The 11-minute ride made no one an astronaut; it merely marked the growing distance between the space tourism class and the rest of us.

A month later, Trump’s Big Ugly Bill passed. Trump’s budget [cuts funding](#) for lunch at public schools and other SNAP programs, continues to imperil nonprofit and public institutions, and reduces the number of people eligible to receive Medicaid and Medicare. A joint study from the University of Pennsylvania and the Yale School of Public Health found that the particular cuts to public healthcare proposed in the bill would result in more than [51,000 deaths](#) annually. The bill also subsidizes mega corporations’ [private jet expenses](#) and R&D costs, directly benefiting the billionaire business class. In other words, Jeff Bezos and his ilk [have been](#) and will be enriched by Trump’s bill while thousands die of hunger and preventable illness.

Weighed alongside these social concerns, that joyride through space felt particularly sickening. Though Blue Origin has not publicized the cost of a ticket, [a similar 2023 trip](#) with competitor Virgin Galactic cost passengers \$450,000. For the majority of Americans, \$450,000 is an impossible amount of money. A lump sum that substantial would change my life. Certainly, 99.9% of Americans would not consider nearly half a million dollars discretionary spending money.

While this stunt may seem apropos of this particular moment, with our bloated technology and dramatic class inequality, the dysfunctional relationship between the uber-rich and the poor has always been a matter of Christian concern. Consider the writings of St. Basil the Great in the fourth century CE. The bishop of affluent Caesarea (modern-day Turkey) asserted that prosperity, not affliction, constituted the greatest Christian trial. When God provides abundantly, he wrote in his sermon “I Will Pull Down My Barns,” the rich face a temptation to “respond with a bitter disposition, misanthropy, and an unwillingness to share,” risking the soul to indulge in gluttony, covetousness, and independence rather than to equitably distribute the resources God so freely gives humankind. In another sermon, “To the Rich,” he writes:

“Nothing withstands the force of wealth: all things succumb to its tyranny, all things cringe before its dominion...The sea knows its bounds, and night doesn’t overstep its ancient limits; but the covetous man ... acknowledges no boundaries: he catches hold of everything, he feeds on everything.”

Greed has no end, and the end of greed is resistance to every limitation—including the limitation of gravity.

Yet the quality of generosity must span socioeconomic classes. “Are you poor?” Basil asks. “You know someone who is even poorer. You have provision for only ten days, but someone else has only enough for one day. As a good and generous person, redistribute your surplus to the [poorest].” Hunger is the worst death, he writes, so do not consign your brother or sister to this fate; share even your last loaf of bread and trust God to meet your needs. Which is to say that God calls every one of us—not just Bezos and Perry—to equalize our accounts with the poorest among us. Whether or not our bank accounts bloat like the billionaire class, God tells us to share what we have as God has shared with us.

What would St. Basil say to these wealthy women, who spent half a million dollars to float and gawk at the planet from above, further enriching [the fourth-richest man](#) on the planet?

I believe his sermons “To the Rich” and “In A Time of Famine” apply:

“How many people could one [of your spaceflights] release from debt? How many broken-down homes could be rebuilt? One box of your clothing would be able to dress the whole shivering populace....”

Further, “whoever has the ability to remedy the suffering of others, but chooses rather to withhold aid out of selfish motives may be judged the equivalent of a murderer.”

Their blood is on your hands, says Basil.

As Katy Perry’s capsule descended, she [sang](#) Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World” to her fellow space travelers. The moment was not broadcast live online, unlike other parts of the trip, but the crew members talked about it after touchdown. Rather than belting one of her own radio hits, Perry sang words that reflected back

the wonder of the moment. Maybe she felt an inkling of what astronauts call “the overview effect”—that is, the experience of communion that comes from viewing the planet from above.

The overview effect is a common experience for space travelers. After liftoff, when they enter zero gravity and see their home world from such a great distance, many astronauts describe feelings of profound connection and longing for humankind: “Raging nationalistic interests, famines, wars, pestilence don’t show from that distance,” said Frank Borman, commander of Apollo 8. “From space, I saw Earth not as a collection of nations, but as a single entity with one destiny,” said ISS astronaut Ron Garan.

Other astronauts describe an acute feeling of fragility: “Below ... contained in the thin, moving, fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to you, all the human drama and comedy ...” said Loren Acton, astronaut on the Spacelab-2 mission in 1985. Neil Armstrong described how, from the moon’s surface, he looked backward and blotted out the glowing star with his thumb. Rather than making him feel powerful, he said he felt “very, very small.” Some felt protective of their world: Aleksei Leonov, the first person to perform a spacewalk (extra-vehicular activity), saw the planet as “small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic.”

Apollo astronaut James B. Irwin said, “That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man.” Karen Nyberg, who was the 50th woman in space, remarked that relations on Earth would change if only everyone could make it to the stars: “If I could get every Earthling to do one circle of the Earth, I think things would run a little differently.”

If only.

The overview effect is one way to connect with humankind. But the most reliable way to connect yourself to those around you is self-impoverishment, according to St. Basil. He followed his own advice, by the way, selling off his property and creating [the first charitable hospital](#) in the ancient world. Basil says that if you redistribute your wealth, you will understand your sister and save your soul in the process—no aeronautics required.